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The Intelligence Establishment

Harry Howe Ransom

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1970

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In the years 1956-1958 I compiled information for a descriptive analysis of the United States intelligence community that had evolved in the decade since World War II. My attention focused primarily upon the Central Intelligence Agency. The result of my efforts, *Central Intelligence and National Security*, was published by Harvard University Press in October 1958. More than ten years have passed since I collected all available material on "the CIA problem" and timorously published my book.

My purpose was to explore a major *terra incognita* of American government, the national intelligence community, the original role of which was to bring the main facts of the outside world to the attention of policy makers. It was apparent that in this role the institution would be of crucial importance and great potential influence in decision making. Because of this, I felt that such an institutional phenomenon required as much description and analysis as its secret nature would permit.

A number of questions about such a study and its publication were raised then, as they will be now. Is it possible to write a scholarly book on a largely invisible intelligence establishment the

archives of which are tightly closed, whose leaders and employees cannot be systematically interviewed, and the product of which is almost always secret? Is it in the "national interest" to collect and publish the material that is available, assuming that this might give some aid and comfort to present or future foreign adversaries of the United States? What good purpose can be served by publishing this information? It was at once apparent that America's new world role after World War II would demand a new system for decision making informed by a vast information-gathering organization. It was also apparent, particularly in the context of the ideological confrontation between United States and Soviet power, that the United States could be expected to enter into the back alleys of international politics to engage in the dangerous game of espionage and covert political action. The proper policy, organization, and system for control of this kind of activity subsumed under an intelligence organization were bound to confront the United States with new problems which would not be easily solved.

My assumption—bias if you will—about the "CIA problem" should be stated at the outset. I believe that in the contemporary world an intelligence system is required for effective decision making. But intelligence is also a source of ever-increasing influence in any governmental system. The secrecy of the apparatus abets its power. As a source of great influence, intelligence and covert operational systems demand the close attention of students of government and politics, just as they demand tight control by responsible policy makers. Too little serious attention has been given to, and inadequate controls have been exerted over, the intelligence establishment since 1947.

Perhaps no segment of the cold war apparatus that developed after 1947 has been more controversial or more misunderstood than the intelligence system—controversial because Americans with their sense of fair play have not been easily persuaded of the necessity of the compromises in moral-legal conduct represented in the duplicity required of secret services. And misunderstood because the secrecy surrounding the system has allowed the growth of legends, mythology, and a highly fictionalized image of the apparatus.

Many significant events have occurred since the research and writing of *Central Intelligence and National Security* were com-

pleted in 1958. There has been a continuing growth of the intelligence bureaucracy and a rise in its level of professionalism. The world-wide intelligence competition has been escalated in intensity and volume. Technology has continued to add to the techniques of collection, analysis, and communication of information. And under a balance-of-terror equilibrium, however stable or unstable, the use of secret services has continued apace.

In the process, the Central Intelligence Agency has become the whipping boy of American foreign policy and to some degree has come to be seen, if dimly so, in the role of the imperialist legions of old. In Communist nations and among developing countries with revolutionary leadership, the CIA represents the spearhead of American interventionism, as, indeed, it sometimes has been. And to American youth at home, goaded to activism either by idealism or by a negative revolutionary élan, the CIA has represented the ultimate in American governmental hypocrisy, this being particularly the mood in the latter half of the 1960's. This symbolic use of the CIA in the hyperbole of the new radicalism has been accompanied in large measure by ignorance of its true nature, its actual organization and functions. A decade ago it seemed useful to compile a survey describing this new phenomenon of American government; it seems even more useful and necessary today to bring this information up to date.

The decade after World War II saw the creation and development of governmental machinery for seeking integrated national decisions. At the apex of the new structure was placed the National Security Council in 1947, designed to give the President integrated intelligence to precede policy choices. The CIA therefore was made a subordinate part of the National Security Council system and a crucially important information-supplying arm of the decision makers.

Today the CIA rests at the top of a thriving intelligence "community," but it has come to have a dual responsibility. It collects, evaluates, and communicates information and at the same time performs the operational function of underground political action and psychological warfare overseas. Yet to most persons it remains a mysterious, supersecret, shadow agency of government. Its invisible role, its potential influence, and the secrecy enshrouding its structure and operations, have long raised important and as yet

unresolved, questions regarding its place in the democratic process. For example: how can a democracy best insure that its secret intelligence establishment becomes neither a vehicle of conspiracy nor the perverter of responsible government in a democracy?

The intelligence establishment of the United States, with the CIA at the apex, has become a multibillion dollar annual enterprise. Yet even many serious students of public affairs, including most members of Congress, possess little or no accurate knowledge of this vast system. A best-selling textbook on American government, published in the 1960s, made no mention of a component of that system with a billion dollar annual budget, the National Security Agency. And textbooks in general still pay scant attention to the intelligence system.

No pretense is made that the following pages give a full and complete "inside story" of America's central intelligence system, particularly of the overseas espionage and covert political action operations. Of these we shall perhaps never see more than the top of the iceberg, at least in this generation. But diligent compilation of unclassified materials makes it possible to open the secrecy curtain sufficiently wide to reveal the structure and some of the methods of a pervasive intelligence system at work in Washington and around the globe.

Formidable difficulties confront any scholar who sets out to describe the history, structure, and principal methods of intelligence. Careful *library intelligence* permits many of these difficulties to be surmounted. I have never been an active member of the professional intelligence guild. Were I privy now, or had I been in the past, to secret information about the intelligence system, security inhibitions would impinge upon my scholarship.

Fundamental problems exist in even attempting an accurate historical survey of the intelligence experience because archives remain closed or certain kinds of documents have been destroyed systematically for security reasons. This problem is illustrated by Sir Kenneth Strong, writing about the intelligence experience in the Ardennes battle in 1944. He recounts in his book, *Intelligence at the Top*, how "Top Secret" intelligence digests containing the most up-to-date operational intelligence were destroyed as soon as they had been used during the Ardennes battle. And even though two digests were kept for the record, one in Supreme Headquarters,

Europe, and one in London, when the war ended both copies were destroyed for security reasons. While one is prompted to wonder whose security may have been at stake, this practice was so common as to make unlikely an objective review of the intelligence system and performance in many important past events. At any rate, this illustrates one aspect of the difficulty of scholarly research in this field. Nonetheless, the subject is far too important to be left unexplored. And on the question of whether this book will aid America's adversaries, I am convinced that they know far more about the United States intelligence system than American observers outside that system will ever know.

While there have been a number of publications on the subject during the 1960's, authentic works remain scarce. My bibliographic indebtedness will be detailed in footnotes and bibliography, but reference should be made here to some groundbreaking treatises on intelligence which have influenced the development of serious scholarship in the field and my own writing on the subject.

Included among these is George S. Pettee's *The Future of American Secret Intelligence* (Washington, 1946), an analysis of World War II deficiencies, with suggestions for the structure of a postwar intelligence system. Sherman Kent's *Strategic Intelligence* (Princeton, 1949), written shortly after the Central Intelligence Agency was established, is an incisive discussion of intelligence as a kind of knowledge, a type of organization, and a unique activity. Roger Hilsman's *Strategic Intelligence and National Decisions* (Glencoe, Ill., 1956) remains the only attempt to explore the nature of intelligence doctrine among policy makers in Washington.

I am indebted to each of these authors and to many more recent ones. Yet none of the works just cited, or those written more recently presents a detailed descriptive analysis of the contemporary intelligence establishment. The purpose of this book is to survey this ground.

My original book, *Central Intelligence and National Security*, was the outgrowth of materials prepared for use by the Defense Policy Seminar of the Defense Studies Program, Harvard University, and thus my debt remains to the students and guest lecturers who participated in those graduate seminars. This is true also for my Defense Studies Program colleagues, notably Professor W. Barton Leach of the Harvard Law School, and including Edward L. Katz-

Preface

enbach, Jr. and Maury D. Feld. Others who assisted me in various ways were the late Professor V. O. Key, Jr., and Walter Millis, Dr. George S. Pettee, and Professors Sanford M. Dornbusch, Samuel P. Huntington, and Walt W. Rostow.

This book bears the Harvard imprint primarily because the late Thomas J. Wilson, as Director of the Press, thought it should be published. I owe much, also, to Mark Carroll, present Director, who encouraged me to produce this new version. The reader will share my great indebtedness to M. Kathleen Ahern, of Harvard University Press, for editorial assistance.

In the preparation of this book I have been assisted by numerous other persons over the years, most of whom will be acknowledged in footnotes and bibliography. Special credit is due William R. Harris of Harvard University, who generously shared with me in recent years his extensive bibliographic knowledge. I am particularly indebted to the Research Council of Vanderbilt University for summer assistance over several years and to the Rockefeller Foundation for a research award in 1964-1965 permitting an exploration of the British intelligence system. My thanks are due also to the Council on Foreign Relations, New York, for an opportunity to participate in discussions of intelligence problems with experienced individuals in 1967-1968.

Typing assistance has been efficiently rendered by Betty McKee and Susan Gauthier. If this book has merit, all of these persons deserve credit; its faults are my burden. My wife Nancy knows how she has helped; perhaps she doesn't know that I know, too.

HHR

Vanderbilt University
Nashville, Tennessee
November 1969

elsewhere outside Washington. A fair guess is that the total number of CIA employees is roughly 15 per cent of the total number of workers in the government intelligence community, broadly defined. Estimates of annual expenditures have been as high as five billions, but this would include all conceivable intelligence activities of the government. Direct expenditures by CIA between 1960 and 1967 probably amounted to between $500 and $750 millions of dollars annually. The most tangible source for estimating the number of CIA's Washington personnel is the CIA headquarters office building with a theoretical capacity initially estimated to be approximately 10,000 persons.[8]

While the general congressional mandate to the CIA is that it collect coordinate, evaluate, and disseminate intelligence affecting the national security, there is an even broader grant of authority in the assignment to it of "additional services" and "other functions" related to intelligence as the National Security Council may direct.

As previously noted, this cannot be read as an unqualified assignment of "other services." Congress clearly intended that the functions of the agency be related to information-gathering. The strategic services assigned to CIA, beginning in the Truman Administration, are a distortion of the intent of Congress. It can be argued, by adherence to rigorous semantic standards, that a substantial number of CIA's operations since 1947 have been performed outside the limits of its statutory mandate. This question will be further discussed later in this volume. Under broad grants of authority and the specific administrative latitude given the Director of Central Intelligence in other statutes, the CIA, operating under NSC directives, has expanded, nonetheless, into a mammoth governmental institution.

The CIA has become at once a central governing authority, a coordinator of strategic information, and a correlator of data gathered not only by its own wide-ranging overseas staff and its thousands of Washington intelligence analysts but also by the dozen or so departmental intelligence units. The total number of persons working within the intelligence community probably exceeds 100,000.

As earlier stated, CIA's operational functions are determined by NSC directives, which have seemed to be based upon the assumption that the congressional statute is a blank check. The fact that

CHAPTER X

The "CIA Problem" Some Conclusions

Scandal is the word best characterizing the context in which most citizens have viewed, in recent times, the intelligence establishment, particularly the CIA. The problems and scandals that have beset the intelligence system are the result of entanglements of definitions, purpose, organization, and policy. An overlay of mythology further beclouds the subject. Perhaps the best way to symbolize this mythology is to cite the observation by Trevor-Roper that in the popular mind the chief of a contemporary intelligence system is seen as a "super-spy." In reality he is a bureaucrat.[1] He works within a political system, and his office is the locus of great potential influence.

The heart of the definitional problem is that "intelligence" has come to be used as a term to label two disparate activities: information gathering and secret political action. This semantic confusion is so pervasive that it extends into the highest levels of government and obfuscates conceptual—and thus organizational—clarity on the subject. A simpler way of saying this is that the government does not always know what it is doing in the "intelligence" field. If so, officials do not in reality control intelligence

this may in part explain the lack of effective coordination and control that characterized some secret operations under the Eisenhower administration. Under Kennedy, there was a promise of stronger presidential coordination and leadership in foreign affairs.[9] Yet the Bay of Pigs, the greatest public disaster to befall the CIA, revealed continuing weaknesses in foreign operational concept, command, and control. The State Department remained in the shadows, failing to exercise its proper authority, while the Pentagon and CIA were in the forefront, playing an ill-defined but patently decisive role. As Theodore Sorensen recalls, Kennedy felt that State had a "built-in inertia which deadened initiative and that its tendency towards excessive delay obscured determination."[10] A question never adequately explored is the extent to which CIA activism may have been a consequence of State Department inactivity. There is little visible evidence that these problems have been of serious concern to either the Johnson or Nixon administrations.

Defenders of the secret intelligence system are quick to insist that there has always been an elaborate set of policy controls on all secret operations. Some have argued that intelligence and other secret operations are perhaps the most tightly controlled activities in all of government.

One cannot examine the evidence on this point, but experienced former officials of the intelligence system argue, sometimes persuasively, that CIA officials have always been required to seek and gain prior approval from policy makers before initiating any secret operations. In the earliest days of the system, procedures for approving secret operations were less formal than in more recent years. Even in recent times, however, it would seem that programs, once initially approved, were rarely given intensive scrutiny, particularly when the question of their continuation came up for policy review. The U-2 incident and more recently the *Pueblo* case are examples of dangerous routinization of operations.

Since the early years of the Eisenhower Administration, which established elaborate procedures for all kinds of national security decisions, covert political activities have been reviewed and approved (or rejected) by a group representing the highest levels of government: the President's Special Assistant for National

Security Affairs, the Number Two man in the Pentagon and in the State Department, and the Director of Central Intelligence. This group has been called at various times the "54-12 Group," "Special Group," and more recently the "303 Group." Other supervisory groups have existed for the review of more technical intelligence operations. Forms and procedures for policy review and control have always existed; CIA leaders have never felt that they were free to operate "on their own." Even before special projects or secret operations come to the highest level for review (if the "303 Group" so recommends, the matter can be passed directly to the President's desk), proposals have run the gamut of interdepartmental review at the lower administrative echelons, perhaps at the level of the Assistant Secretary or even of the "country desk." Ambassadors in the countries involved theoretically, as of 1969, have a veto under normal circumstances, in any proposed secret operations within their jurisdiction.

When hundreds of secret operations are projected by a nation with world-wide commitments and extensive operational forces, true control will be determined by three factors: (1) the basic assumptions or "state of mind" of those at the highest policy levels; (2) the intelligence they possess, which is mainly supplied by the same system they are supposed to be controlling; and (3) the energy and determination of top policy makers to make this control effective. One may seriously doubt whether their "span of attention"—given a vast array of other duties and of decisions they must make—can actually result in effective policy control. And, further, it should be kept in mind that operational management of a secret agent may be at once the most important and most difficult to exercise. Control, as it has existed through much of CIA's history, has perhaps been more a matter of form than actuality. At any rate, the results have been less than the nation should demand.

Cover. Secret warriors and intelligence agents depend heavily upon "the art of cover," as they term it. They must often shield their true identity, purpose, and operations. As noted earlier, World War II had produced a vast international apparatus for applying American power around the world, including an Office of Strategic Services. When the war ended, its Director, General Donovan, proposed that the secret part of this apparatus be made permanent.

comment on the matter. This would seem to be the wisest policy for the American government to follow in the future, along with a very conservative attitude toward mounting secret operations in the first place.

The foregoing pages have described in detail the American government's organizational response to the worldwide information explosion and to the shifting requirements of the nation's world power position. I have chosen to apply to the variety of intelligence organizations the descriptive term "intelligence establishment." By this I have not meant to suggest a monolithic "invisible government" but a set of agencies with common missions and great potential power in shaping the picture of the external environment in the decision maker's mind. I do not pretend to have found a way to measure this power but I see it existing and growing, often in league with a military-industrial-labor complex. And thus the problem grows of controlling these new loci of power, for uncontrolled political power is incompatible with democratic government.

Finally, to summarize my prescriptions: (a) organizational mistakes which have combined foreign information gathering and political action need to be repaired by surgery; (b) covert political operations should only be undertaken to prevent a direct threat to national security and as an alternative to overt military action; and (c) the President and State Department should exert effective policy control over secret foreign operations at all times. Put another way, the President and National Security Council must effectuate their authority to know what the intelligence establishment is doing and to control it.

Can Man Survive Technology?

Paradoxically, intelligence, in both its principal meanings, will be required if man is to survive technology. An intelligence establishment is both a threat and a possible savior to any nation's legitimate political system. It is a threat in an age of information explosion, when policy makers must depend heavily upon the system to collect, analyze and interpret, and communicate information, often at great speed. Thus the intelligence establishment possesses the power potentially to control the informational assumptions of a decision. Intelligence is a possible savior because

correct decisions for the future cannot be expected, barring luck, to result from inadequate information. A decision rarely can be better than the information upon which it is based. But the required information is not likely to be forthcoming in the absence of a clearly defined purpose, supplemented by rational information policies, strategies, and organizations.

The threat of a gargantuan intelligence establishment can best be contained by an alert press, and by vigilance on the part of Congress, the public, and the scholar about what will certainly be a continuing problem. And the promise of an intelligence system is intimately related to an acknowledgment of its dangers and closer attention than previously given to its proper policy, organization, and control.